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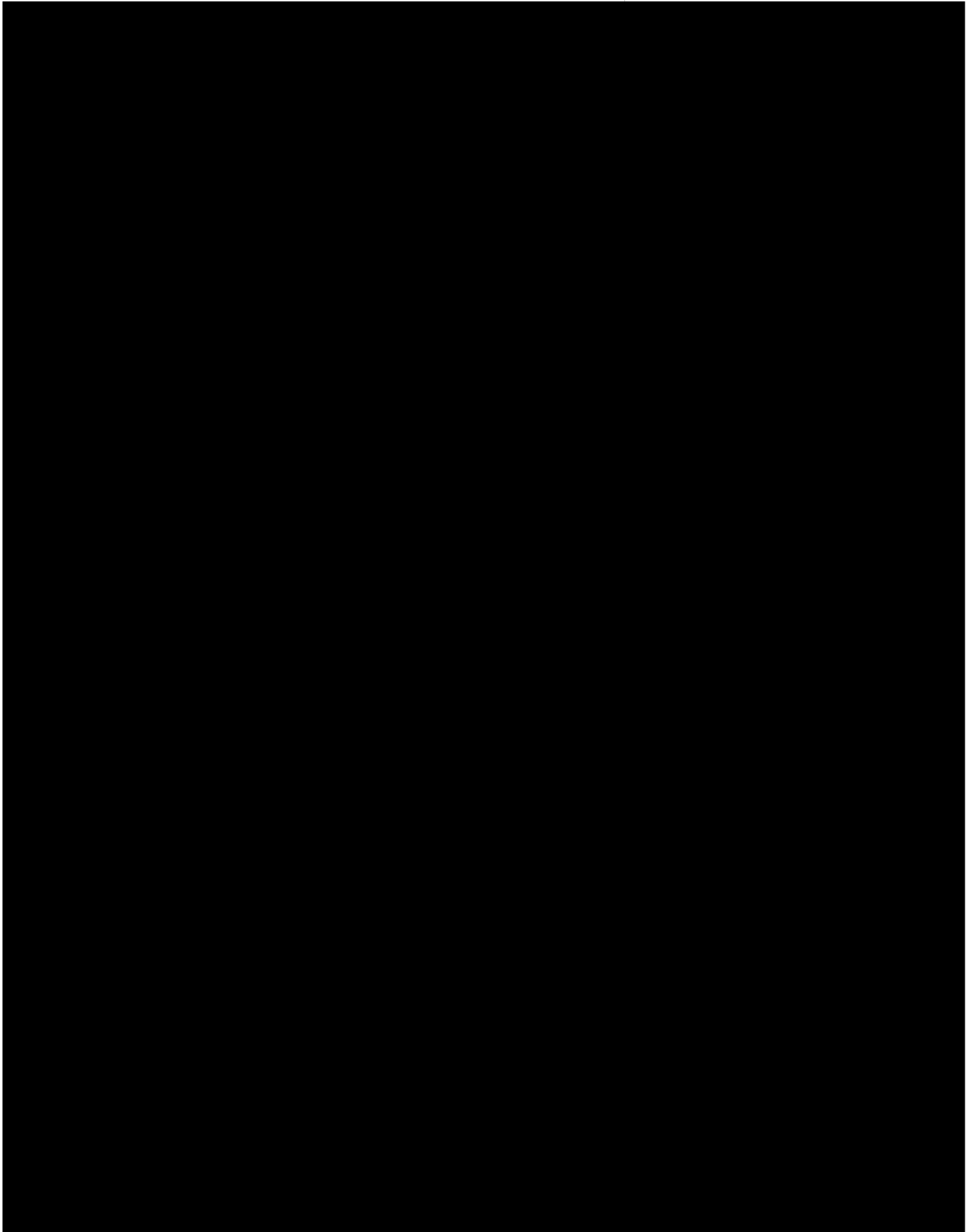
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ASIA

Lisbon Tries to Sort Out Views On Future of Portuguese Timor

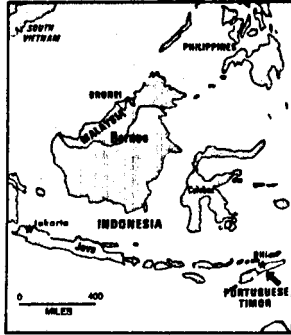
Portugal may be trying to sort out its views on the future of its overseas province of Timor.

Several Portuguese colonial officials and politicians from Timor, including the governor, were scheduled to go to Lisbon earlier this month for consultations on the decolonization process. The governor apparently will stop over in Jakarta after the Lisbon consultations to discuss the Timor political situation with Indonesian officials.

The new Portuguese government has gradually shifted its policy from its earlier assumption that Timor would remain tied to Lisbon and now seems prepared to accept Timor's eventual annexation by Indonesia in four or five years. Independence for the island possession is not regarded as a real alternative in Lisbon.

This view was, in fact, conveyed to the Indonesians last October by a visiting Portuguese official who said a union of Timor with Indonesia was a "logical" step. The official added that Portugal wants an orderly and peaceful transition that would provide the people of Timor an opportunity to express their desires.

Portugal will probably be reluctant to permit early annexation by Indonesia heedless of the will of the Timorese. It is this reluctance and the idea of a referendum that gives the Indonesians pause.



Despite Portugal's assurances of consultation with Indonesia on the future of Timor, Indonesian leaders have become increasingly concerned that Lisbon—perhaps under increasing leftist influence—may ultimately accept independence for the colony. This concern is reinforced by Jakarta's awareness that any early effort to accommodate the principle of self-determination would work against Indonesia's interests.

As a last resort, Indonesia is prepared to take military action to prevent creation of an independent Timor state.

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